A FABLE

HOW I SPENT MY SUMMER VACATION

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Or; The Cornice Ledge Follies

Where to begin? I suppose the first thing you'll probably want to learn about is what I was doing on the ledge of the roof of a building without any invitation to repair the gargoyles. I was in a bad way, if you must know. Everything had come to grief. I was not completely alone in this endeavor. Both of us were up there — my shadow and I. If you want the cold, unfeeling, practical answer, I had made my way from the ground onto the roof, then from the roof onto the ledge down, which was only a matter of hopping down. Now I was faced with the definitive hop. You'll find the poetic reply carries more truth. None of my works, neither "Plaintive Lament" nor "Lamenting Plaint," had set well in my bean. So I was wracking my mind as to whether or not I should take my first and last pavement plunge. As I eyed the sidewalk below, a window directly opposite from me across the street shuddered open. Behind was a pitch-black void, presumably a room, and two errant, wizened hands, flanked by darkness, drew forward to rest themselves on the window sill.

A voice spoke.

"How long have you been there?"

I said that I did not know, which was true.

"Do you know," the voice continued, "what you're doing up there, precarious-like and all?"

I told my tale of woe.

"Tragic, sinew-twisting," said the voice, "but then I suppose a permanent vacation like that is bound to kick up a fuss about somewhere. Could put you on the map, to be sure. Posthumous-like, and all. But then, that sorry plaint business could cause a stir by itself. And you could do it more than once. Decisions, decisions."

I told him that seemed to add up, and asked if the voice was looking for answers out of curiosity or because of more terrestrial matters.

“I suppose it should be pretty terrestrial now,” the voice returned, “but when it means a great deal to my mind. Do you know what happened to my gnome? I kept him out here, all fine and peachy keen-like and all. I turn away from the window, gnome there, then I turn back, no more gnome. I don’t suppose you could help me. You would’ve remembered if you had seen it. Must’ve fallen down, the poor thing. All smashed to bits. Probably couldn’t tell what leg goes where, which bits belong inside and which are out, everything strewn about everywhere. Ghastly to imagine. I don’t like to think of it. Psych-like and all. Perhaps it was a wanton act of self-destruction.

“Or, and just entertain me here, maybe the work of some occult hand. The culprits I have in mind vary. An errant gust of wind, some sort of bird, perhaps. There wouldn’t have to be foul play, either. Might’ve been accidental. Manslaughter-like and all. I suppose it could’ve turned out worse. I know a tenant who keeps a baby out here. Live one, I mean. Has a specially-designed cage for it too. Eeriest thing you ever saw. Takes all types, so they say. Another one just puts a geranium on the sill. Characters of every sort living here, dramatis personae-like. Maybe I’ll get a pumpkin next time. Still, though, that gnome had always been my solace. Consolation-like. Oh yes, your laments and your plants. Think it over.”

The hands retreated with the voice, and the window was closed once more.

I stood still, wondering. Pacing back and forth, I thought it over some more. Neither practically nor poetry seem to offer a comforting answer to my next question: how to get down?

THE END

Decisions, Decisions:

Where to begin? I suppose the first thing you'll probably want to know is what I was doing on the ledge of the roof of a building on a Thursday at 6:31 in the P. M. without a job in HVAC. I was in a bad way, if you must know. Everything had come to grief. Not that I was completely alone up, mind you. Both of us were busy contemplating the jump — my shadow and I. If you want the cold, unfeeling, practical answer I had made my way up from the ground to the roof, from the roof to the ledge, the latter of which was a small matter of hopping from one to the other. Now I was deliberating the definitive hop. You'll find the poetic reply carries more truth. None of my poems, neither "Plaintive Lament" nor "Lamenting Plaint" had set well on my bean. So there I was, wracking my mind, as to whether or not I should take my first and last pavement plunge. As I eyed the sidewalk below, I heard a scuffling from around the corner of the ledge. I looked up and saw another malcontent.

"Don't waste your time with that side," he said, "they've got all sorts of marquees and bannisters and things, people with umbrellas down there. A pretty sight, it would not be. It's a no-go."

He sidled over to assess the view from my part of the ledge.

"Some guys have all the luck," said the man, "looks like a clean drop down to me, mezzanine-like and all. By the by, what are you in for?"

I told him my tale of woe.

"Tragic, sinew-twisting," he said, "I'm up here for my own reasons. I'm a talent manager, only I haven't got the natural ability for it. I'm not very good, I mean. Managerial-like. But then, that's one you've got on me. A permanent vacation like that is bound to kick up a fuss somewhere, could put you on the map, for sure. Posthumous-like and all. But then, that sorry plaint business could cause a stair by itself. And you could do it more than once. Decisions, decisions."

I remained motionless as he cast his gaze downward.

"Well, I figure I'll shove off. Somewhere else, I mean. I've got some clients on the other ledge to help me up."

And he sidled off from whence he came.

I stood still, pondering. Pacing back and forth, I thought it over some more. Neither practicality nor poetry seemed to offer a comforting answer to my next question: how to get down?

THE END?